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Substantive session of 1997

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 6th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 30 June 1997, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. GALUSKA (Czech Republic)

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GE.97-62315 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

The PRESIDENT declared open the 1997 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council. He said that the continuation of the restructuring effort in the economic and social fields was more pressing than ever, now that the United Nations, under the direction of the new Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, had put into effect a first series of measures aimed at bringing it more closely into touch with the contemporary world and its problems. The initiatives proposed as part of Track Two of the reform process would be announced shortly. It was important that the Economic and Social Council should participate fully in the consideration of those proposals and in the implementation of the decisions to which they would lead.

General Assembly resolution 50/227 remained the instrument whereby the reform of the Economic and Social Council must be guided. Some of its important provisions could and should be implemented without delay. Substantial progress still needed to be made in the review and streamlining of the Council's subsidiary bodies. It was to be hoped that negotiations on the matter would be completed during the session. Some results had been achieved already in simplifying the Council's agenda but consultations should continue on the topic, as well as on the elimination of items which had become obsolete. To allow for continued advances, the consultations must take place in a climate of confidence and with determination to grasp the global problems of mankind through a strictly rational and sober approach.

One of the important tasks entrusted to the Council was the coordination and evaluation of the follow-up to the major international conferences organized by the United Nations. As the recent special session of the General Assembly on the implementation of Agenda 21 had shown, although views on the problems that stood in the way of sustainable development were growing closer together, agreement on remedial measures was far away. Agreement was absent also on the question of available financial resources. Informal consultations would be held on that important matter in the course of the session.

The topic of the high-level segment would be "Fostering an enabling environment for development". There were divergent opinions about the preconditions for such an environment. Complete agreement might not be

achieved, but it could nevertheless be hoped that the discussion would make it possible to find a field of agreement and would lead, as resolution 50/227 required, to the adoption of agreed conclusions. That would only be possible if the interventions took the form of a genuine dialogue. In addition, to enlarge the scope of the discussion, the Bureau had decided to invite a number of eminent persons, including representatives of the private sector, to participate in panel discussions to be held outside the regular meetings.

Lastly, the high-level segment must not obscure the importance of operational activities and coordination matters, which were also part of the session's agenda. If the discussions led to the adoption of a set of realistic and implementable resolutions on all those items, a major contribution would have been made to the reform of the Council.

Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General in charge of the Economic and Social Departments) said that a number of particularly important events had taken place since the previous substantive session of the Council. Firstly, Member States had continued their debate on a development agenda which would define both a theoretical approach and an order of priority for United Nations action in the field of development. Secondly, the Organization was now entering the implementation stage of the major international conferences. That stage, as had been seen at the previous special session of the General Assembly, aroused quite as much interest as the conferences themselves and it was essential for the intergovernmental bodies and the Secretariat to equip themselves with the means of carrying out their mission in that regard successfully.

Lastly, the process of reforming the United Nations was gathering speed. In the economic and social field, in addition to the reforms undertaken on the basis of General Assembly resolution 50/227, a major restructuring had taken place with the decision, announced on 17 March 1997, to merge the three departments of the Secretariat formerly engaged in analytical, normative and operational activities, while at the same time integrating the technical support services for the Council into the Department of Conference Services. Without being a complete innovation, the merger was a response to felt needs, particularly in regard to the implementation of the conclusions of the major conferences. Although the preparation and consideration of general policy would continue to be carried out essentially in the functional commissions,

only the Council had the mandate to give the necessary directives to the funds and programmes responsible, on the basis of the major orientations defined in that way. That unified structure could be expected to enhance the Council's capacity to respond effectively to the so-called "new" problems registered at the major conferences.

The challenge, as far as the work of the session was concerned, would be to succeed in adopting agreed conclusions, as called for specifically in General Assembly resolution 50/227. The discussion would need to be very open and very flexible in order to facilitate consensus. To that end, plans had been made for panel discussions in which representatives of civil society, including the NGOs, would take part.

The informal dialogue with the heads of the United Nations funds and programmes would centre on funding for operational activities for development. The theme chosen for the high-level debate - fostering an enabling environment for development - had a macroeconomic dimension, with the question of financial flows constituting a specific sub-theme. The point there would be to prove that fruitful discussions could be held in the Council on macroeconomic questions.

The importance of the question of water resources, one of the two themes of the coordination segment, could not be overemphasized. Consensus had been reached on the matter at the special session of the General Assembly on the implementation of Agenda 21, and the Commission on Sustainable Development would take it up in 1998. In the case of the steps taken to promote gender equality, as a follow-up to the Beijing Conference - the second theme for consideration in the coordination segment - attention should be drawn to the Secretary-General's appointment of Mrs. Angela King, Director of the Service for the Advancement of Women, as a special adviser on the matter.

In the course of the session, therefore, the Council would be asked to face up to a number of challenges, not least the length of its agenda, and to demonstrate its new dynamism in the context of the reforms already sketched out in the development agenda. The Secretariat would certainly spare no effort to support it in bringing its work to a successful conclusion.

Mr. JIN YONJIAN (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services) expressed confidence that the session of the Council would reflect the many positive changes resulting from the restructuring and revitalizing process. The Council had streamlined its agenda while at the same time ensuring that the important issues affecting social and economic development worldwide remained prominent. Its emphasis on a dialogue among the participants and on the involvement of civil society were also commendable.

The theme for the high-level segment was timely and of significant importance to all Member States. The question of the funding of operational activities, to be considered under item 3 of the agenda, was of critical importance and the Council's recommendations on it could have far-reaching implications for the development efforts of the United Nations system. The participation of all the executive heads of the United Nations funds and programmes reflected the value placed on the Council's guidance in that vital area. The two major topics to be debated in the coordination segment were also of interest to all the world's peoples. In its consideration of those items, and for the rest of its agenda, the Council could count on the full cooperation of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services.

The new Department, which integrated the major technical support services for the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and their subsidiary bodies with Conference Services, was determined to deliver improved services with greater accountability and cost-effectiveness. Through the synergy thus established, it would be in a better position to avoid duplication and to plan and monitor documentation. Lastly, the central coordination of conference-servicing resources would allow for their more flexible allocation, taking into account varying needs. All those efforts would be carried out in full collaboration with the various substantive Departments of the Secretariat.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (E/1997/100; E/1997/L.15 and L.21)

Adoption of the agenda

The PRESIDENT said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Council wished to adopt the agenda in document E/1997/100.

It was so decided.

Organization of work

The PRESIDENT proposed a number of changes to the provisional programme of work for the 1997 substantive session (E/1997/L.15): item 4 (a) would be taken up on 9 and 10 July and item 4 (b) on 11 July; two meetings would be devoted to item 5 on 16 July; item 8 would be taken up in the morning of 17 July and item 6 (c) on 18 July.

During the high-level segment, the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General of the United Nations would address the Council at the morning meeting on 3 July.

Mr. MEYER (Luxembourg), speaking on behalf of the European Union, expressed concern that the programme of work proposed for the afternoon of 23 July might be rather too heavy.

The PRESIDENT said that the Bureau would look into the matter.

Mr. MARRERO (United States of America) thought that any discussion of agenda item 8 could only be general and might well prove premature since the Secretary-General had not yet put forward his Track Two reform proposals.

The PRESIDENT said that the Council would have before it the Secretary-General's report on the question, which would not contain any recommendations. The Council would therefore restrict itself to a general discussion of the actions described in it.

Mr. DLAMINI (Observer for Swaziland) expressed the hope that all the documents would be made available to delegations sufficiently in advance to give them time to consider them. That would make the discussions more fruitful.

The PRESIDENT took note of the request and invited the Council to approval the provisional programme of work as orally revised.

Document E/1997/L.15 was adopted as revised by the President.

The meeting was suspended at 11.20 a.m. and resumed at 11.25 a.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION:

(a) COORDINATION OF ACTIVITIES ON A SYSTEM-WIDE BASIS: FUNDING FOR OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT: IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 50/227 (E/1997/68; E/1997/78)

Informal dialogue with the executive heads of United Nations funds and programmes

Mr. SPETH (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme) said he was glad that the Council's session was opening with an informal dialogue which offered an opportunity to stress the importance of close ties

between the normative work of the United Nations system and its operational activities. Pending the reform proposals to be presented by the Secretary-General, he would refer only to the progress already achieved in improving coordination of operational activities, both in the field and in regard to capacity-building.

Steady progress had been made for some time in channelling coordination efforts into achieving the targets set in support of country programmes. Three elements were particularly important in that connection: the Development Assistance Framework, common premises and services, and the Resident Coordinator system. The Development Assistance Framework made it possible to ensure the coherence of the support provided by the system as a whole in response to the needs of countries as defined in the Country Strategy Notes. That approach was soon to be tested in some 10 countries. The sharing of premises and services was a complicated matter, but it had been possible to establish a timetable for realizing that objective in the next few years. Lastly, the importance of the Resident Coordinator system had been strongly reaffirmed, as well as the need to take concrete measures to improve its management. A number of initiatives in that direction had recently been approved by the Executive Committee on Development Operations. Serious efforts had been made to select the best candidates in the light of each country's needs, and to ensure that the Resident Coordinators had acquired experience in different organizations: currently, 45 of the 153 Resident Coordinators had worked in more than one organization. The fact that, in accordance with the decisions of the General Assembly, it normally fell to the UNDP resident representatives to fill the office of Resident Coordinator put a heavy responsibility on the Programme; incidentally, its financial contribution to the system was some $100 million a year. Although the Resident Coordinator system was currently functioning better than ever - thanks, in large part, to the work done by Mrs. Sadik - there were still too many weak spots. Efforts would be made to remedy those in accordance with the informed guidelines suggested by the Council.

Capacity-building for the eradication of poverty should be at the heart of operational activities. The informal dialogue with the executive heads of United Nations funds and programmes and the dialogue that would take place in

a week's time with United Nations country teams should allow the Council to form a clear idea of the operational activities under way and help it to formulate its conclusions and recommendations in that area.

Mrs. SADIK (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund) said that UNFPA was determined to contribute effectively to capacity-building rather than funding activities which were only sustainable with outside support. It was carrying out studies of countries' absorptive capacity and was participating actively in the work of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ), the United Nations Secretariat and other bodies with regard to national execution and capacity-building, in preparation for the triennial review. Experience showed, however, that there were penalties for moving too fast since, if Government was not ready for national execution, the burden often fell on UNFPA's lightly-staffed country offices, with a serious loss of efficiency.

UNFPA had played an active part in drawing up system-wide guidelines. As a follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, it was operationalizing three programme areas: reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health; population and development strategies; and advocacy.

UNFPA was motivated essentially by a concern for country-level coordination and the need for more relevant and timely assistance to countries. It was convinced of the need to streamline and simplify the number and complexity of guidelines, procedures and processes.

The reform of the United Nations development system was also a topic of great interest and concern. UNFPA had participated constructively in the reform process undertaken by the Secretary-General. It was an active member of the Sectoral Group on Development Operations which was continuing to work on programme harmonization. The members of the Group had already agreed on the principle of a United Nations Development Assistance Framework and harmonized budgeting, under which each organization would have its own programme identity and its own budgetary mechanisms.

UNFPA was in favour of strengthening the Resident Coordinator system. To ensure impartiality, the post should be separate from any individual

organization and the Resident Coordinator should be able to represent all mandates and issues equally well, especially those deriving from the 1990s international conferences.

UNFPA fully supported the principle of common services and premises and had worked with the other members of the Group to ensure its implementation in a businesslike manner. It hoped that the current reform exercise would serve to strengthen the system while maintaining the distinct identity of the various components.

Mrs. BERTINI (Executive Director, World Food Programme) said that the World Food Programme (WFP) had been engaged for some years in reforming its own organization. A new initiative had been launched in that connection in 1996. The essential features of the plan, to be completed by the beginning of 1998, were: the establishment of 11 regional offices, the increased delegation of authority to regional managers and country directors, the strengthening of field staff management skills, and the downsizing and restructuring of staff at headquarters.

Other reforms were also under way, including the implementation by WFP of the country programme approach and improved financial management. Another initiative was aimed at promoting WFP activities not just in the developing countries but among donor countries, where the aim would be to assemble more resources.

Regarding constitutional reform, she said that the revisions proposed by the WFP Executive Board had been reviewed in May by the FAO Council and recommended by it to the FAO Conference. They would be reviewed by the Economic and Social Council and, if approved, would come into effect on 1 January 1998.

Lastly, WFP supported the reform process started by the Secretary-General. It had taken an active part in the Track One reforms. It was an active member of the Executive Committee on Development Operations and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, and was taking part in the work on common premises and services. It had also contributed to strengthening the Resident Coordinator system, particularly in the field. Radical reforms must be made in the system to enable the Resident Coordinators to provide the best possible response to the needs of the peoples concerned.

Ms. BELLAMY (Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that UNICEF was deeply committed to the reform process. Her own organization had developed a Management Excellence programme, which had established a clear set of principles and professional standards for all staff, clarified accountabilities and interrelationships between the headquarters and country and regional offices, streamlined oversight of programmes, increased effective field management and developed new programme and financial-management information capabilities. Further improvements included integrated budgets, increased electronic connectivity among offices, reduced cycle times for procurement and delivery of supplies, and adoption of the United Nations Integrated Management System. Implementation of field programmes and coordination with other United Nations bodies had become much more effective. All that had been done in less than two years within a zero nominal-growth budget.

However, structures should not be seen as the essence of reform, harmonization or collaboration. What counted was the improvement of operations at the field level - in the case of UNICEF, the test was whether the changes made significantly improved the lives of children.

The joint Development Assistance Framework was becoming a reality. Established in consultation with the authorities in each country, it set forth the major themes and sectors for achieving, at the country level, the goals set at recent international conferences. It had been tried out in Ghana and some invaluable lessons had been learned.

The Resident Coordinator system could be still further improved. It was a matter of widening recruitment, establishing and clarifying lines of communication and responsibility, eliminating potential conflict-of-interest situations, and developing a more systematic mechanism. The question of common premises should be examined in terms of cost-effectiveness. Overall, Track One was proceeding at a good pace and UNICEF was confident that the reforms would improve its working relationships with other United Nations bodies and lead to more effective programme delivery.

As its contribution to capacity-building, UNICEF had supported the Bamako Initiative, based on decentralization and the development of local management capacities in the provision of basic health services. Universal child immunization was focused on the development of national programmes.

Basic water and sanitation interventions were premised on local management through community committees. UNICEF was also supporting the development of tools for monitoring children's rights that could help failed or fragmented States to meet their reporting obligations to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

An important inter-agency collaborative exercise in evaluation and follow-up was the independent evaluation of Operation Lifeline Sudan, an example of a protracted complex emergency. UNICEF was working with a range of partners - WHO, the Aga Khan Foundation, Rotary International, and the World Bank among them - to develop practical indicators of the sustainability of immunization programmes; field testing would start before the end of the year.

In conclusion, she made a number of brief observations of a more general nature. First, the role and functioning of United Nations operational activities depended upon results at the country level. It was necessary therefore, to develop better performance indicators, define accountabilities more clearly and make greater use of best practices. Second, it was essential to update, simplify and make more relevant the system of rules, regulations and procedures currently in force in the United Nations. In particular, financial mechanisms were needed that would make it possible to work more easily with the Bretton Woods institutions. To do so, it was necessary to institutionalize the working relationships with those bodies and with the Governments represented both in the Economic and Social Council and on the Boards of the World Bank and the IMF which could play a key role in that regard. Fourth, an effort must be made to reach out to civil society, especially the private sector. Lastly, achieving all those goals would require additional resources.

Mr. AMORIM (Brazil) said that he would like to know what importance each organization attached to South-South cooperation, or trilateral cooperation, for example between a country of the North and two countries of the South. Like other participants, he felt the need for some intergovernmental mechanism that would determine priorities in such fields as reconstruction or development programmes with a conflict-preventive aspect. As matters stood, when there was a crisis, the Security Council was called upon, but after that each organization took its own decisions, without any

intergovernmental body deciding that a particular country or region should have priority. That was a decision of principle which would normally be the task of an intergovernmental body. The Economic and Social Council should play that role, which would help to revitalize it. He would welcome the comments of the Under-Secretary-General in charge of the Economic and Social Departments on the point.

Mr. MARRERO (United States of America) said that the General Assembly had already recommended an early exploratory review, to be prepared jointly by the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions, to assess mechanisms, programmes and relationships at the field, headquarters and intergovernmental levels, with a view to identifying areas in which communication, cooperation and coordination could be improved. He would like to know whether any progress had been made in that direction, whether any difficulties had been encountered, and when information on the results obtained could be expected. His delegation was very anxious that the project should be completed and, if there were difficulties in the way, it was ready to take all necessary steps to overcome them. Although he welcomed the harmony which seemed to reign in regard to the reforms, he believed that there were nevertheless some areas of concern and disagreement. He asked what problems were still not settled. Also, in respect of the Resident Coordinator system, he would like to know what weaknesses and what areas of disagreement there were, and how the process could be advanced.

Mr. ORJONIKITZE (Russian Federation) said that his delegation supported all the efforts of the funds and programmes to improve the effectiveness and coordination of their activities. He would like to know what prospect there was of increasing the resources available for operational activities. The Russian Federation was very much in favour of coordination in the field: accordingly, the Resident Coordinator system should be strengthened. He would like to know what difficulties there were in respect of coordination with the Bretton Woods institutions in particular, and what could be done to overcome them. Lastly, he asked the executive heads of the funds and programmes how they envisioned the role of their respective organizations within the framework of the restructuring of economic and social development assistance.

Mr. SPETH (Administrator, UNDP) said that, as far as the possible merger of the governing bodies of certain funds and programmes was concerned, it would be better to wait for the Secretary-General himself to put his proposals before delegations in the report to be published on 16 July 1997. He was sure, however, that the role of the Economic and Social Council ought to be more structured in the proposed reform, whatever it was, as the representative of Brazil had said.

There had been a marked advance in the coordination of field activities with the Bretton Woods institutions at country level, and both IMF and the World Bank had undertaken henceforward to support the operational development bodies in their efforts to eradicate poverty, decentralize activities and promote national execution. The dialogue with the World Bank in particular was increasingly important, since the Bank needed to become more familiar with the new techniques for capacity-building. Arrangements must be made for a division of labour and responsibility, for that clearly fell on the United Nations and UNDP.

In reply to the United States delegation, which had asked what specific improvements should be made in operational activities, he said that, for example, the post profile for the Resident Coordinator should be more specific. The task was not as simple as it seemed: in particular, a whole series of important steps had to be taken regarding the authorizations to be obtained, the relationship of projects to certain humanitarian operations, and so on.

In reply to the representative of the Russian Federation, who had asked what sources should be approached in order to have more money to spend on operational activities for development, he said that that was a vital question which the Council would be dealing with under another agenda item. Undoubtedly, there should be a marked increase in the ODA share of available resources and States should reaffirm their commitments to that effect.

Mrs. SADIK (Executive Director, UNFPA) said, in response to the questions about the state of South-South cooperation, that UNFPA had started two programmes in that connection which were already yielding results: a programme of establishing centres of excellence, and a partnership programme arranged by developing countries among themselves. UNFPA was also promoting

South-North cooperation: an adolescent reproductive health programme had been put into effect in the Caribbean, modelled on similar programmes in the United Kingdom.

On the question of the merger of the various governing bodies of the funds and programmes, she too felt that it should be left to the Secretary-General to announce for himself what he had in mind. She recommended, however, that practical steps should be taken to encourage participation by the countries of the South in joint sessions or meetings; for example, by paying their travel expenses.

On the Council's policy-making role, she said that, currently, the dialogue between the Council and the operational activities for development bodies was certainly improved but the Council still relied too much on the passive mechanism of having statements delivered to it. It should try to find a way of encouraging a genuine dialogue. Furthermore, the operational bodies had to report to a great many committees and commissions, which was not a very productive use of their time. There again, the Council should look for ways of making the mechanism more effective.

The representative of the United States had asked what problems remained to be solved at the operational level. It was not so much a question of actual difficulties as points that needed to be cleared up. In particular, the Resident Coordinator received his instructions from the system as a whole, meaning that objectives at the country level were not clearly defined. CCPOQ was responsible for directing occupational activities, and it was for it to issue clearer and more specific guidelines.

The idea of thematic groups should be further developed and given a greater role. They should be able to pass on to the persons responsible for field activities the priorities set by international conferences, in respect of reproductive health, for example, or gender equality. The groups should also be in a position to ensure that activities were coherent, because that was not always the case at the level of orientation.

Henceforward, the evaluation of UNFPA field activities would be carried out jointly with IMF and the World Bank. However, the results did not always make it possible to say how the available funds could best be used.

Ms. BERTINI (World Food Programme) said, in response to the Russian delegation, that WFP relied increasingly on local procurement, which

had many advantages: making it possible to provide the population to be assisted with the food supplies they were used to, economizing considerably on transportation costs, and so on. In addition, and again with a view to promoting South-South cooperation, the previous session of the Governing Board of WFP had come out in favour of national food aid programmes: WFP would provide the services of experts but the food supplies would be provided by the beneficiary countries. In that way WFP was working to build capacity in the field.

The Economic and Social Council should undoubtedly retain a central role in policy-making, though it should confine itself to establishing major principles. A body such as WFP should be given full freedom to organize the action to be taken with the countries concerned.

On the question of structural reform, raised by the representative of the United States, she said that it was necessary above all to avoid conflicts of interest. The Resident Coordinator should speak on behalf of the United Nations and not of any particular operational body. On the question of the volume of resources, raised by the Russian delegation, she recalled that, in 1996, WFP had established a long-term resources forecast to make the situation more transparent to the contributors. However, many donors continued to make tied contributions, which considerably restricted flexibility. WFP needed to succeed in establishing a sufficiently convincing system to persuade States to increase their contributions. Both reflection and dialogue were needed in that connection, since financing was satisfactory when WFP had to deal with humanitarian emergencies but less so when it tried to plan for the long term. Perhaps it would be necessary to envisage making internal transfers.

It had been difficult to establish cooperation with the World Bank because the Bank was not used to working in emergency situations. However, the difficulties were gradually being overcome.

Ms. BELLAMY (Executive Director, UNICEF) said that the number of ratifications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was rising steadily, which she regarded as proof that UNICEF's activities continued to arouse active interest in the great majority of States.

On the question of possibly merging the governing bodies of various funds and programmes, she said that UNICEF was already more or less prepared

for that, since it worked in close cooperation with many of them and found the feedback from such contacts very useful. Such a regrouping, however, should be taken as an opportunity to increase the number of informal meetings and contacts, since they were more fruitful than formal ones. It was also important to keep discussions regarding children as apolitical as possible.

The United States representative had talked about "problems" remaining to be solved. In the case of UNICEF, it was more a question of challenges to be met: for example, when it was necessary to accommodate to programming cycles. Questions such as common premises and services, so as to combine the necessary purchases, could certainly be settled, even if the same solutions could not be adopted immediately everywhere.

The definition of the Resident Coordinator's functions still raised questions. UNICEF's view was that the person concerned should be the tool of the system. Therefore, his powers needed to be more closely defined, as well as his position in the hierarchy and his channels of communication with it. Substantial progress had already been made in that direction.

The amount of resources for development continued to dwindle and the fault lay in certain harmful obstacles or trends: the economic difficulties being undergone by many donor countries; the custom which had arisen of asking them for multi-year commitments; the steady advance of bilateral assistance. Action must be taken to stem those trends. For example, it would be to the advantage of the various bodies to adopt the same accounting and evaluation procedures.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

PROVISIONAL

E/1997/SR.7
4 July 1997

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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Substantive session of 1997

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 7th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 30 June 1997, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. GALUSKA (Czech Republic)

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OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION:

(a) COORDINATION OF ACTIVITIES ON A SYSTEM-WIDE BASIS: FUNDING FOR OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT: IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 50/227 (continued)

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GE.97-62296 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION:

(a) COORDINATION OF ACTIVITIES ON A SYSTEM-WIDE BASIS: FUNDING FOR OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT: IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 50/227 (agenda item 3 (a)) (continued) (A/52/155-E/1997/68, E/1997/78)

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to continue its informal dialogue with the heads of United Nations funds and programmes.

Mr. MEYER (Luxembourg), speaking on behalf of the European Union, asked what measures were contemplated to widen the basis of the recruitment of dissident coordinators and to guarantee their independence, particularly in relation to their organizations of origin. He also requested further information about the content of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and its complementarity with existing documents, such as Country Strategy Notes (CSN) and the existing country notes of the World Bank. It would also be interesting to know the views of the panel on the prospects of improving contacts with the specialized agencies.

General Assembly resolution 50/227 requested the executive boards to make their own arrangements for financing programmes, and he would like to know the thinking of the secretariats on those matters. He wondered whether the possibility of following the example of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in mobilizing financial support from the private sector was being considered by other agencies.

Ms. LETROT (France) said that she noted from paragraph 33 of the report on field coordination (E/1997/65/Add.2) that several resident representatives of the United Nations system had indicated that they were not sufficiently motivated to devote the necessary time to supporting resident coordinator system functions, and would like to know what was being done to remedy that situation. She agreed with the representative of Luxembourg that it was highly desirable to separate the functions of resident coordinators in the field from their functions as local heads of funds or programmes. During discussions on the internal reform of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), it had emerged that the objectives assigned to UNDP personnel, particularly with regard to resource mobilization, did not necessarily correspond to the needs of the system as a whole.

She wished to ask the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) what had been the advantages and disadvantages of the change of status of programme directors to representatives. On the question of shared premises, she would like to know whether the specialized agencies had been associated with the rationalization exercise, and whether there were many identified cases of extra costs arising when, for example, premises previously free of charge were placed at the disposal of several agencies. She wondered whether the problems arising from the diversion of UNDP housing stock were retarding joint work on that matter.

She wished to ask the Under-Secretary-General in Charge of the Economic and Social Departments how he proposed to organize relations between his new department and the agencies responsible for field implementation.

Mr. MABILANGAN (Philippines) said that administrative reforms to the United Nations system must not be made at the expense of implementing development plans, and he wondered what provision there was for striking a balance between demand and supply in cases where a CSN embodied priorities differing from those of the DAF and whether a third document might possibly be required. He also asked in which document priority sectoral concerns would be identified. Like the representative of France, he wondered what progress had been made towards involving the specialized agencies at the country level, where further clarification of their mandates might possibly be required. While welcoming the strengthening of the role of the resident coordinators, he would be grateful for further information about coordinating mechanisms between them and the regional programmes.

Ms. BELLAMY (Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the role of the resident coordinators had been extensively discussed in the development operations group and it seemed to be the general view that there was need for some improvement, in such points as selection, responsiveness to the needs of the system as a whole, and problems arising out of the dual function of the coordinators. The whole question was one on which discussion was likely to continue for some time.

As far as the DAF was concerned, one of the great advantages was that, where a common country assessment could be arrived at, a common database could be built which different agencies could use in shaping their programmes, without compromising the identity and accountability of individual programmes.

As for cooperation with the specialized agencies, the funds and programmes were generally working more closely with them at the country level. If a common country assessment could be achieved, she hoped that the specialized agencies would choose to participate.

Ms. BERTINI (Executive Director, World Food Programme (WFP)) said that the performance of resident coordinators, also acting as UNDP resident representatives, had previously been assessed exclusively in terms of the latter function. In future they would have objectives set as coordinators for the United Nations and have their performance appraised partly in terms of that function. The recruitment of resident coordinators would be best considered at the end of the working year when UNDP carried out its customary review of the posts required. The post of resident coordinator should be seen as a career opportunity for staff from a variety of agencies.

As for the example set by UNICEF in mobilizing funds from civil society, WFP had for the last couple of years been trying to gain new partners to help to promote anti-hunger issues. It was also talking to some business corporations about food or cash contributions and had made contact with educational circles in some countries, in the hope of encouraging more enlightened attitudes towards its work.

WFP shared premises in about half the countries in which it worked, and, where that was not so, it was for particular reasons, such as the availability of rent-free accommodation.

Ms. SADIK (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that UNFPA had several mechanisms for cooperation with the specialized agencies, such as the guidelines issued for cooperation with WHO, and UNICEF, on reproductive health, and it also had agency support teams for cooperation with WHO, UNESCO, FAO and the regional economic commissions. There was also an inter-agency task force, and common guidelines had also been established in the follow-up to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

Several new financing methods had been explored, for example by approving larger country programmes than UNFPA could itself manage, so that donors could buy into such programmes. The possibilities of private-sector funding were also being explored, as were contacts with new government donors.

UNFPA had carried out a survey on views on population, reproductive health and other relevant issues in various countries, which had publicized the findings. Field trips for parliamentarians to see what was being done by UNFPA had also been organized. The possibility of debt swapping was also being explored with a number of donors.

With regard to the resident coordinators, she said that their functions should be clearly defined and separated from those involved in representing any single organization. They should also set common goals to be pursued on behalf of the whole system, which was particularly important where fund-raising was concerned. UNFPA also derived many advantages on the use of its field officers, who had more time to promote particular sectoral activities than the coordinators.

In reply to the question by the representative of the Philippines, she said that she herself would like to see a more unified approach than was sometimes possible by using CSNs. The coordination of thematic working groups should emerge from country programmes, rather than the reverse. The coordination of regional programmes on a system-wide basis presented problems that were still very much live issues for the DAF. A common set of principles was required, and they could be derived from guidelines worked out by follow-up groups.

Mr. SPETH (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that he shared the view that the impartiality of the resident coordinators was of fundamental importance, and the UNDP Executive Committee had taken a number of decisions to ensure: that, at all times, they acted on behalf of and in the interests of the system as a whole; that they understood that, in all cases, the primary interests to be consulted were those of the system and not of UNDP or any other agency; and that adequate time was allotted to them to carry out their coordination duties.

A recent questionnaire had shown that, across all the regions, they spent, on average, about one third of their time on their resident coordinator functions but believed that they could usefully spend as much as half of their time on them. Arrangements were to be made to ensure that they were able to do so. As far as UNDP was concerned, if the figure began to exceed 50 per cent, a country director could be put in to assume the day-to-day management of the Programme.

As for performance appraisals, the resident coordinators would continue to report to the Secretary-General, but independent performance appraisals against standards agreed among all the agencies would be carried out. As long as resident coordinators continued to have two sets of responsibilities, some give and take had to be allowed for, but the alternative - a full-time resident coordinator - would weaken the system rather than strengthen it. Such a person would have no programme and no standing, and time would also be wasted because coordination responsibilities were not full-time activities.

UNDP was also establishing a sense of collective responsibility for the resident coordinator system through the Office of United Nations System Support Services (OUNS), into which secondments of staff had been made from UNFPA, WFP and UNICEF.

As for the specialized agencies, they had not yet been involved in any of the formal processes to which he had referred, although it might at some future time be possible to invite their participation.

On the point raised by the representative of France, he thought that there might be some misunderstanding. The main thrust of paragraphs 30-33 of document E/1997/65/Add.2 was that there was a need to create incentives for all funds and programmes to support the resident coordinator system. He agreed with the representative of Philippines that any reform made should enhance not reduce development effectiveness.

The proposal contained in the DAF was that the advisory notes from various funds and programmes should be consolidated, while ensuring that, wherever there was a CSN in place, the advisory note should be in response to it. There would never be a situation under the proposals for the DAF in which the identification of each programme was lost.

As far as regional cooperation was concerned, he believed that the regional economic commissions would be the most suitable focal points for coordination.

Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General in Charge of the Economic and Social Departments), replying to the representative of France, said that dialogue between the Council and the various executive boards was being actively promoted to ensure better coordination between the Organization's normative and operational activities. To that end, heads of task forces had participated in the coordinated follow-up to major international conferences such as the World Summit for Social Development. Similarly, conference

secretariats had been fully involved in the operational side of funds and programmes within the framework of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC).

Although the outreach capacities of the various secretariats were modest in comparison with the scale of funds and programmes, their policy advisory services would prove useful in the first stage of the follow-up to normative activities, as at the sessions of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Biannual meetings at working level between the relevant secretariats had been proposed, with a view to promoting a better understanding of each side's role.

Mr. CALOVSKI (Observer for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Secretary-General's reports (E/1997/65 and Add.1-4) provided a clear definition of the Organization's operational problems, namely a decrease in resources, falling numbers of donor countries and an insufficient relevance of operational activities to a number of Member States including developing countries, least developed countries (LDCs), small island States and countries with economies in transition. Despite a welcome reduction in duplication of activities and an increase in resources from the private sector, the overall situation remained unsatisfactory.

The Council, in accordance with its obligations under the Charter, should make recommendations to the General Assembly concerning the future policy of United Nations programmes, and the measures to be adopted by Member States and the other parties concerned. The Secretary-General was to be commended for stressing country-level capacity-building in his reports.

The weakening role of Governments in international relations could have been foreseen in view of the globalization of the world economy and changing market forces. National Governments tended to be more preoccupied with internal affairs, whereas civil society and the private sector were participating more actively in international relations. Paradoxically, the improvement in the global economy had not brought about any increased funding for the United Nations.

The Council must adopt an "all-embracing" policy, since political will, humanitarian preoccupations and the urgency of eliminating poverty and halting

the spread of mass diseases were all of equal importance. With a view to ensuring that the Balkans met General Assembly requirements and became a stable zone of development by 2000, the priority there was to accelerate integration into the European Union.

In the politically problematic humanitarian assistance field, the focus should be on preventive action and post-conflict emergency relief. In the social field, elimination of poverty through development must be stressed; in the economic field, sustainable growth and development, full integration into the world economy, increased market access and country-level capacity-building. No nation should be marginalized or forgotten.

The United Nations agencies were faced with the onerous task of ensuring that they remained relevant to the economic and social development of specific countries and that the assistance provided was effective. The Council should not, however, be too pessimistic with regard to funding, since contributions from the private sector were likely to increase and new donors would emerge from among the developing countries.

The adoption of the Agenda on Development and the outcome of the Special Session of the General Assembly on Agenda 21 were both to be welcomed. The success of the United Nations agencies would, in future, be judged on their achievements at country level, and not at their headquarters. He would like to know what concrete measures were being implemented to increase resources for operational activities and what arrangements had been made with regional organizations, such as the European Union or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Ms. HAGA (Observer for Norway), having welcomed the focus on reform in the introductory speeches and expressed support for the substantive proposals made, said that the strengthening of the resident coordinator system and the common premises strategy all constituted steps in the right direction, and UNDP was to be commended on the leadership role it had assumed in that regard. While approving the general direction of Track One of the reform process and looking forward to its full implementation, she stressed that the golden opportunity for broader reform must not be missed. The Secretary-General should be encouraged to make his proposals for reform, which

were to be submitted to the Council at its current session, both courageous and comprehensive. The onus would then be on the Member States to support, modify or reject them.

A more integrated system at the country level was a prerequisite for attracting investment in and support for the United Nations development system, as was the Organization's willingness to work in a system-wide context. Piecemeal reform would no longer suffice; human and financial resources must be pooled to create a stronger system to serve as a more interesting partner for the developing countries and the Bretton Woods institutions. Turf battles between individual agencies must be proscribed since they could prove damaging to the entire United Nations system and to the reform process as a whole.

Mr. DLAMINI (Observer for Swaziland) said he wondered whether any comprehensive strategies actually existed for addressing situations at a regional or national level before they escalated. He cited, in particular, the human suffering in the Great Lakes region of Africa. What concrete measures were being implemented by UNICEF to alleviate the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo? How was WFP intending to address the food problems of southern Africa? Disputing assertions in the documentation that food production had improved in the subregion and that there had been a "bumper crop" in a certain part of Africa (E/1997/41, para. 6), he stressed that his country in particular had suffered from the consequences of drought. He wondered, therefore, what justification there was for relocating the WFP office away from the country.

Commending the efforts of the International Programme for the Development of Communications (IPDC), he said that even greater efforts must be made at grass-roots level to ensure that population development issues were handled in a culturally sensitive manner. To ensure continued relevance, full account should be taken of the dialogue that had taken place at the previous Council's session, especially with regard to a new development agenda for Africa. That would be preferable to embarking upon new themes.

Being concerned that Africa should not be marginalized, he said it was time that more Africans sat at the "high table". The senior levels of the

Secretariat did not currently reflect equitable geographical distribution. Africans, too, should be given the chance to influence the international community, for they were equally competent to do so.

Mr. SOMAVIA (Chile) said it was important to identify bottlenecks in the area of coordination. The statement by the representative of Norway reflected a general feeling on the part of Governments that programmes with common objectives established at major world conferences should coordinate their activities as much as possible.

Improved coordination of the resident coordinator system would require efforts by the various agencies, but also by Governments, which were accustomed to dealing with them on an individual basis.

The United Nations suffered from an image problem. Derogatory references to the Organization had become a general practice; some countries went so far as to use quite unacceptable language, while others had simply fallen into the habit of referring to the United Nations as an inefficient bureaucracy. It had also been said that the Security Council, of which Chile was currently a member, lacked the political will to resolve problems in countries such as Rwanda and Somalia. There seemed, in fact, to be an international obsession with the work of the Security Council, often to the detriment of other components of the United Nations system. Some agencies, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were very much in the public eye. He wondered how the Member States could collectively assist other United Nations agencies to project a more accurate image of the Organization's work.

At its current session, the Council would, for the first time, discuss the question of coordinated follow-up to the major international conferences and summits. United Nations agencies and the Governments of the Member States must work together to ensure implementation of the commitments made on those occasions.

Conflict prevention was too often neglected, and problems were ignored until they resulted in emergencies. In other cases, after a political agreement had been signed between the parties to a conflict, the Security Council merely issued a final resolution calling on the international community to cooperate in the reconstruction and development of the country in

question, which then disappeared from the public eye. The Council had a role to play in such situations, as authorized under Article 65 of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. RUNGE (Germany) asked whether the UNDAF was to be considered as a new procedure or a strengthening of existing coordination procedures, such as the CSN, which had already been established by various executive boards.

Mr. AKRAM (Observer for Pakistan), speaking with regard to the reform of the economic and social segments of the United Nations system, said he wondered whether the coordination between the various agencies which the idea of a single executive board was designed to enhance was feasible without direct supervision from the Secretary-General. In the past, that function had been entrusted to the Office of the Director General for Development and International Economic Cooperation thus preventing any single operational agency from playing a supervisory role. Consideration should, perhaps, be given to re-establishing that Office in the interests of inter-agency cooperation.

When the governing councils of the various bodies had been replaced by executive boards, it had been understood that the change would lead to increased donor support, but that had not been the case. The currently-proposed reforms were also accompanied by promises of increased funding, which were equally unlikely to be fulfilled. It was time to seek reform, where necessary, in the interests of greater efficiency rather than that of increased donor support.

Mr. SPETH (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)), speaking in reply to the observer for The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, said that he had not suggested that the regional economic commissions should take over, or even be the principal executors of, regional programmes, but rather that a regional administrative committee on coordination should be established to improve coordination at the regional rather than the country level.

In reply to the question by the representative of France, he said that misallocation of the Reserve for Field Accommodation had not been a factor in slowing down the move towards common premises.

He agreed that the Council had an important role to play in dealing with countries in special development circumstances before, during and after crises; however, such a role would require the establishment of new structures within the Council and, in particular, of smaller committees which could meet more regularly to discuss critical issues.

In reply to the representative of Chile's question concerning bottlenecks in coordination, he pointed out that the United Nations had many successes of which to be proud and that existing problems were being, or would soon be, addressed. Resident coordinators' responsibilities sometimes exceeded their leverage at the country level, and their influence was sometimes overly dependent on personal relationships at the local level. Some of them did not spend enough time in meeting their responsibilities or lacked the necessary skills or humanitarian experience, while others had failed to recognize the need for a team approach under their leadership.

There had been conflicting signals from Headquarters and from other United Nations agencies concerning the responsibilities of the resident coordinators, and conflicts might have arisen between their two roles of resident coordinator and UNDP resident representative. There was no clear job description for the post. There was a need for further recruitment of resident coordinators from other agencies, for a performance measurement system and for additional financial and human support for the resident coordinator programme.

There had been only slow progress in the harmonization of procedures, formats and financial management systems. Governments did not always support the system or made conflicting demands on it. Training opportunities existed, but had not been made available to all resident coordinators. However, all of those problems were being addressed.

The best way for the United Nations to improve its image was to develop strong cooperative programmes at the country level and to communicate the success of those programmes to the public. He emphasized the importance of integrated diversity at both the country and Headquarters levels and the importance of the agencies' ability to act either in cooperation or independently, as required. It should be remembered that the sum total of all

United Nations development assistance was less than that provided by bilateral donors, and preference should be given to country-driven strategies and, in particular, to those contained in the CSNs.

With regard to the question by the representative of Germany, he said that UNDAF was not a new procedure but a way of bringing existing mechanisms together. It had not yet been possible to move from information sharing to country-driven strategies, and the purpose of UNDAF was to provide a framework for discussion of ways of meeting the needs of individual countries. To that end, he hoped that more CSNs would be produced.

With regard to the question by the observer for Pakistan concerning the former Office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Coordination, he hoped that all Member States would support the Secretary-General's approach to reform. He agreed that there had been an unfortunate pattern of increasing reforms leading to decreased, rather than increased, donor support which, if it continued, would put an end to the Organization's credibility and to the reform process as a whole.

Ms. SADIK (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)), replying to the question by the observer for The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, said that UNFPA had received a $35 million four-year grant from the European Union for a programme in Asia and was working on a similar programme for North Africa. There were plans for a meeting in Europe concerning countries with economies in transition.

With regard to the comment by the observer for Norway, she said she agreed with the observer for Pakistan that the reform of the governing councils had not always led to increased resources; although, her own agency had, indeed, received increased funding. She also agreed that there must be a system-wide approach to reform; however, Governments must commit themselves to supporting those reforms, which were too often thwarted because the agencies scheduled for reorganization included some nationals of certain countries. Furthermore, the reform process had given insufficient consideration to programmes with a demonstrated track record, which should be protected from imposed change.

With regard to the statement by the observer for Swaziland, she said that UNFPA endeavoured to take national and cultural concerns into consideration and had set up a new programme on culture, norms and mores, with particular emphasis on Africa.

In reply to the representative of Chile's question on bottlenecks in coordination, she said it was true that the dual responsibilities of the resident coordinator system had led to various conflicts and that Governments preferred to work with individual agencies. Some Governments had weak coordination mechanisms, which in turn weakened the United Nations system, while other Governments were strong and saw a strong United Nations coordination system as a threat.

The role of resident coordinator must be separated from the representation of any one organization at the institutional level. Resident coordinators were justified in fearing that a lack of funding would lead to their marginalization, and Member States must allow the resident coordinators to be the final arbitrators before any programme was negotiated with a Government. In that regard, it was important that a common database and statistics should be used as a basis for all such programmes.

In reply to the observer for Pakistan, she said that the role of the former Office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Coordination should be re-examined to see why it had not worked well. The original idea had been to separate the functions involved and to give the supervisory role to an objective, impartial individual. However, there was a need for a better and more objective selection process, an accurate job description and performance evaluations.

It was unfortunate that the image of the United Nations was dominated by political considerations and that the public as a whole did not understand the purpose of assistance programmes and the activities of the various agencies. Follow-up to world conferences was a good way of achieving a common agenda.

In reply to the representative of Germany's question, she said that the advantage of the UNDAF, which was a refined rather than a new procedure, was its potential for providing a common system for situational analysis based on the guidelines established at major conferences and leading to a common development framework.

Ms. BERTINI (Executive Director, World Food Programme (WFP)) said that WFP had phased out its activities in certain countries in order to direct its decreased resources towards the areas of greatest need. The Executive Board had defined general criteria but had left it up to the Secretariat to decide on specific action. By the end of 1997, WFP would have phased out its programmes in 20 countries, most of which were no longer least developed or food deficit countries and therefore no longer qualified for multilateral food aid.

The Executive Board had mandated that over 50 per cent of the agency's resources must be allocated to least developed countries (LDCs) and over 90 per cent to low-income food deficit countries. Some WFP activities had been phased out because Governments had not cooperated with existing programmes or because those programmes were so small that their overhead costs were as great as the cost of food delivery. She assured the observer for Swaziland, however, that WFP was still capable of handling emergencies, even in countries where it did not have development programmes.

With regard to the questions concerning WFP donors, she explained that, while WFP relied heavily on a small number of major donors, there were also many small donors, including four developing countries which contributed over US$ 1 million a year and about a dozen countries or entities which had recently either become new donors or vastly increased their contributions. In reply to the question by the observer for Pakistan, she said she was convinced that the best way of encouraging donors to increase their contributions was to improve the cost-effectiveness of programmes, not only through reform of the Organization but also through good management practice.

Furthermore, WFP must be proactive in communicating the needs of the poor in order to encourage support for its programmes. As the representative of Chile had pointed out, the media tended to cover only emergencies rather than long-term projects which enabled the poor to help themselves. Emergency funding received more attention than development funding, and public awareness of the latter must be increased.

Track One of the reform process was proceeding apace, but much remained to be done. She looked forward to having future proposals by the Secretary-General and to Council decisions on further reform of the United Nations.

It had been suggested that the Secretary-General should have greater responsibilities for United Nations agencies. In fact, she thought there was a need for overall accountability and the Secretary-General should, perhaps, be in charge of all United Nations agencies; the general public did not realize that that was not the case.

Problems arose at the level of communication between agencies and Government representatives, and even between the ministries and representatives of a single Government which might be involved in the work of various agencies. Another restriction on coordination was the fact that resource allocation was increasingly dictated by outside sources. However, experience had resulted in the recognition of problems; there were many countries where the resident coordinator programmes had functioned well, and she expected further improvement in the long term.

Ms. BELLAMY (Executive Director, United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF)), speaking with regard to bottlenecks in coordination, said there was a need to make agencies less personality-driven. Member States had pressed for increased coordination, but there were cases in which Governments had been able to make positive use of the different elements of the United Nations system. Another problem was the lack of coordination among donor Governments.

It was true that the media found United Nations development work less interesting than the Organization's problems and failures. Clarity in describing the goals and achievements of the United Nations would help to improve its image. UNICEF was working increasingly with civil society, as well as with Governments and other United Nations agencies.

In reply to the comments by the observer for Swaziland, she pointed out that in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had provided basic health and education assistance with a focus on family reunification and unaccompanied children.

She drew attention to the 1996 UNICEF State of the World's Children Report, which had focused on children and war, and to Ms. Gracia Machel's more recent report to the General Assembly on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1). It was important to focus not only on the country level, but also on that of the global community, in order to reduce the occurrence of such conflicts.

In reply to the representative of Germany, she said that the UNDAF was an attempt to build on past experience and to gain an overall picture of existing resources and relationships between programmes. She was encouraged by the introduction of the UNDAF and by the changes in the resident coordinator programme under Track One of the reform process; the ultimate goal must, however, be improved assistance to countries rather than reform for the sake of reform, and results rather than appearances must be the measure of success. Donors wanted their resources to be efficiently used and, in a climate of decreased government funding, UNICEF was currently receiving one third of its resources from the private sector. That was because it had been able to demonstrate its success in improving the conditions of children in the countries where its programmes were implemented.

Ms. DURRANT (Jamaica) asked how UNFPA in particular would assess its record in regard to capacity building for national execution.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said that his own country's experience was that the various agencies which had operated in Bangladesh over the years had performed well in their respective areas and had contributed significantly to improving the lives of the people. That experience should be borne in mind in the context of so-called consolidation.

Noting that a number of United Nations conferences had been held and resolutions adopted on the problems of the least developed countries (LDCs), he asked how far they had succeeded in coordinating and focusing attention on those problems at both the field and Headquarters levels. He would also like to know to what extent the various agencies cooperated with the regional economic commissions. Lastly, it would be useful if the Council and the General Assembly could be more fully informed regarding the work of the ACC.

Mr. MARCH (Australia) said that the quality of the resident coordinator system was the greatest challenge facing the United Nations in the field. Reform under both Track One and Track Two was vital and he fully supported the comments of the representative of Norway in that regard.

On the question of resources, he supported the comments of the representative of Chile regarding the image of the United Nations. Funds should be sought in order to do a few things well, which could then be used as

leverage, rather than setting larger and less tangible objectives. Donor countries were looking for tangible outcomes and for evidence of successful resource utilization.

Mr. PEDERSEN (Observer for Denmark) said that the Secretary-General's decision on Track One was the most important step of recent years. The conclusion whether or not the United Nations was relevant as a development organization would inevitably be based on an evaluation of its activities at the country level. The four elements which would determine whether the United Nations could exert a positive influence were the resident coordinator system, the UNDAF, the establishment of common premises and services and, last but not least, the availability of well-qualified professional staff.

It was generally agreed that the resident coordinator system must be strengthened and much had been done already in that regard. The point at issue was whether the resident coordinator should be linked to the operational system. His own delegation believed that, without such a link, the so-called "two hat" model, the resident coordinator would have no credibility. It was hard to see why that should constitute a major problem.

As far as programming within the UNDAF was concerned, he suggested that experience in India, as recently reported, constituted a desirable model. As for the common premises and services, his delegation supported the cost-effective initiatives already taken by the Secretary-General. The problems that had arisen in certain cases should not be allowed to hold back the whole exercise.

With regard to staff, his delegation supported the steps already taken. One element of the highly important process of staff-performance appraisal should be the staff member's contribution to coordination, which should be regarded as the responsibility of the entire country team.

While some progress had already been made in the implementation of Track One, there had been too much argument as to why it should not take place rather than on how it should be implemented. Track One reform was, however, a first prerequisite for making the United Nations system more relevant. One of the earliest consequences of failure in that regard might well be reduced

contributions to some or all of the agencies concerned. He looked forward to the implementation of the Secretary-General's Track Two reforms at the country level.

Mr. LOZANO (Mexico) asked whether there had been any effort to harmonize the measures taken to ensure coordination in the field with those at the Headquarters level. He also asked what were the chief lessons to be learned from the experience of coordination in the field.

Mr. KONISHI (Japan) asked whether, in view of the importance of the functions of the resident coordinators, any consideration had been given to the possibility of involving Member States in their appointment. As far as the performance of the resident coordinator's duties was concerned, it was advisable, given the importance of an integrated approach to development, that he should have a point of contact with Member States, for example, in respect of the presentation of a CSN. There should be full consultation during the formulation of the CSN, not only with the Government concerned but also with donor the countries and the Bretton Woods institutions.

Mr. SIMKHADA (Observer for Nepal) said that the essence of any reform package was its ultimate impact and not its structure. He asked the administrator of UNDP in particular how the current restructuring process would help to strengthen the participatory approach to development rather than the traditional top-down model that intergovernmental organizations seemed to adopt at the country level.

The programme of national offices referred to by the Executive Director of WFP was interesting and he would welcome a broader picture of the way in which the process was developing. He would also like to know how the rights-based approach to the needs of children, and of society as a whole, in the developing world, referred to by the Executive Director of UNICEF, was working in actual practice.

Mr. MACHIN (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) said that the successful implementation of Tracks One and Two of the reform process was absolutely crucial to the ability of the United Nations to move ahead. He agreed with the representative of Australia that it was vital to resolve the current debate about the resident coordinator system. Many issues were involved, demanding careful consideration, but some agreement must be

achieved in order to make it work. The notion of trying to delink responsibility for the resident coordinator system from the operational part of development activities did not seem a useful one.

Mr. PEDROSO (Cuba) asked whether there had been any calculation of the amount of resources that could be reallocated as a result of the reform process. The representative of Norway had said that the provision of resources by member countries would depend on reform achieved through integration. Integration and efficiency were not the same thing, however, and the aim must be to enhance and consolidate the delivery of assistance.

Mr. SPETH (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that his agency was working very closely with the Secretary-General on the proposals for Track Two. While the decision on how to move forward rested, of course, with the Secretary-General himself, all the agencies had had a chance to put their proposals to him. A bold programme of reform would be needed and he welcomed in that connection the proposals put forward by the Nordic countries and the members of the European Union. He understood also that the Group of 77 had recently had a successful meeting with the Secretary-General.

Much interest had been expressed in the resident coordinator system and making it work better. Basically, there were two ways of doing so. If the position of resident coordinator became a full-time job, it would have to be linked to the operational system and given real authority and real resources. Alternatively, the "two hat" model could be retained. The conflict that might arise under the two-hat system had been exaggerated and could be dealt with. There was already, he thought, far more complementarity than conflict, but that was for the Secretary-General to decide.

There was cooperation with the regional economic commissions at the country level in UNDP programming and the commissions sometimes served as executing agencies. That cooperation should be strengthened and continued.

He agreed that greater transparency and better communication was required in respect of ACC. Its deliberations, of course, concerned Headquarters rather than country-level cooperation, but the results should be made available to Member States. There was also the Joint Consultative Group on Policy which worked to harmonize policy at the country level.

On the question of the selection of resident coordinators, he said that his agency had already developed a country profile, in consultation with the country concerned, describing the types of qualification needed. Governments could, of course, reject candidates and in some cases had done so. The process was in place and was working reasonably well.

On the question of participation, he agreed that the restructuring process must promote a more participatory approach. A powerful dialogue was needed with governments and with civil society and nothing proposed in the reforms would do anything but strengthen such a dialogue.

Ms. SADIK (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund(UNFPA)) said that the penalty that she had referred to in connection with capacity-building was that, in some cases, a model of national execution had been agreed upon where the capacity did not exist, and the burden had then fallen entirely on the small UNFPA national office. Her agency was currently studying a system of guidance to the field in assessing capacity and of helping to build capacity where it did not exist.

In general, there had been a substantial increase in national education, but more needed to be done in terms of assistance - in training content, for example, and of auditing requirements - which she hoped would be taken up by the system as a whole.

She agreed that the Indian model was an excellent one. The Resident Coordinator there was to be congratulated on the way in which he had set himself apart from any one organization and taken an overall view of his role. He was, of course, an exceptional person but it should be possible to learn from his experience and see how a model could be developed.

She agreed that the resident coordinator system must be linked to operational activities and an institutional approach worked out that would not rely on personality. The contribution of staff members to the work of the team should form part of any performance evaluation. It was generally accepted that the resident coordinator system must be made to work, but there was not as yet any collegial agreement on how that should be done. The Secretary-General would make his decision in the near future. The results-oriented approach already adopted by her organization was a measure both of achievements and of persisting constraints.

Ms. BERTINI (Executive Director, World Food Programme (WFP)) regretted that the impression might have been given that the agencies were arguing among themselves about Track One. They were all involved in implementing it and many positive results had been achieved. Progress had already been made on common premises and services, although some problems remained.

On the resident coordinator issue, she emphasized that all the agencies were committed to strengthening the system. There were differences of views: some agencies wanted to keep the "two-hat" system rather than have a separate and independent resident coordinator. The important point was that the person wearing the two hats should be able to distinguish between them. The distinction had been blurred in the past and one solution to the problem would be to make the position separate and independent.

With regard to staff, she pointed out that her agency had already converted a number of international posts to national ones and that, in its new regional offices, specific jobs had been designated for filling by national rather than international staff members.

On the question of the UNDAF, she said that it did actually add value to the process and that fairly rapid progress had been made, with all agencies participating. As for timing, UNDAF came after the CSN and the Country Programme Assessment but before the agencies worked out their own programmes.

As far as the measurement of achievement was concerned, WFP would need to focus more on the development side and the new evaluation system would seek to do precisely that. On the emergency side, the agency had already learned that it was necessary to decide ahead of time, through the contingency-planning process, how the success of a programme was to be defined and when it should be regarded as completed.

On the question as to whether resources were sufficient, she said that of course they were not. However, no matter how great its resources, WFP would never be able to solve the problem of world hunger alone and all must work together to make a difference.

Ms. BELLAMY (Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the resident coordinator system had already been a major topic in the agencies' group discussions and all of them attached high priority to it. It was fully recognized that both tracks of the reform

process must be put into effect and that the credibility not just of the United Nations itself but of the entire system was at stake. At the same time, care must be taken to ensure that at least those portions of the process relating to development and human rights were genuinely visionary and bold. Discussions regarding common premises and services were already proceeding rapidly, with criteria already adopted and a timetable set up.

On the question of qualified staff, she agreed that performance evaluation was crucial. Future reform would need to focus generally on improving the management of human resources. On the lessons learned through measuring outcomes, she said that UNICEF had already been successful in setting quantitative measurements. Like all the agencies, it faced a greater challenge in improving qualitative evaluation.

Some of the reforms had already had a measurable impact: for example, four agencies would shortly be presenting their budgets in a harmonized format. The UNICEF perspective whereby programming was based on rights rather than needs helped to build a certain sustainability into the process. That approach was just beginning to be followed in the field.

Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General in charge of the Economic and Social Departments) said that the administrative savings that would result from the amalgamation of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, the Department for Social Information and Policy Analysis and the Department of Development Support and Management Services had not yet been worked out but would be seen when the revised estimates were presented. He stressed that the administrative savings to be redeployed for development would not simply be those resulting from the merger but all those that would arise from the reform and restructuring process. More specific proposals would be made at a future stage in that connection. He thanked his colleagues from the agencies for their replies to questions and, while not hiding their areas of disagreement, for highlighting in the large areas in which they were working together in harmony.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.